



ITS

NUMBER 19

Interpreting The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

Subject: Deteriorated Plaster Finishes

- Applicable Standards:**
- 2. Retention of Historic Character
 - 5. Preservation of Distinctive Features, Finishes and Craftsmanship
 - 6. Repair/Replacement of Deteriorated or Missing Features Based on Evidence



Keeping deteriorated plaster fragments as found without repairing the plaster finish is not an appropriate rehabilitation treatment for most historic building interiors.

Issue: Finished plaster walls and ceilings are important in defining the character of many historic buildings. But *deteriorated* plaster surfaces are not character-defining and they are not representative of the historical appearance of a building. Just as removing plaster to reveal brick which was never exposed historically does not meet the Standards, leaving a historic plaster wall in a deteriorated condition also does not meet the Standards. Deteriorated plaster should always be repaired, or replaced with gypsum board, in a rehabilitation project.

Leaving as found remnants of plaster on the walls imparts a ruined appearance to the interior which is not compatible with most historic buildings that had finished interior spaces. It is also not appropriate to add new distressed plaster to bare brick in an industrial interior which has never been plastered. Nor is it appropriate to create an antique look by leaving areas of lath exposed instead of replastering it or by breaking out sound plaster to reveal wood lath or brick underneath.

Although there are a few exceptions—if plaster is missing completely or if it has been removed by a previous owner—the recommended rehabilitation treatment is to repair deteriorated plaster. Or, if it is too deteriorated to repair, it should be replaced with gypsum board to return interior surfaces to their traditional, historically-finished appearance. Leaving interior (or exterior) finishes in a damaged

condition is *never* a recommended rehabilitation treatment. In most instances, such treatments will be denied certification, and remedial repair work will be necessary to bring the project into conformance with the Standards.

Application 1 (*Incompatible treatment, exposed brick*): Built c. 1900, this small, three-story, brick structure was rehabilitated for retail use on the first floor, with residential use above. Historically, the walls were finished plaster. However, after years of deferred maintenance, when rehabilitation work began much of the plaster was in a very deteriorated condition and only patches of it remained on the walls. As part of the rehabilitation, the owner kept what remained of the plaster in its as found condition in the apartments on the upper floors. This treatment was determined to be incompatible with the historic character of the building. In order for the project to meet the Standards the owner was required to repair the plaster or replace it with gypsum board.



Left and center: Deferred maintenance had resulted in considerable damage to the finished plaster on the upper floors of this small commercial building.

Right: Because the plaster walls helped to define the historic character of the interior, the deteriorated plaster had to be repaired or replaced with gypsum board in order for the rehabilitation project to meet the Standards.

Application 2 (*Incompatible treatment, exposed lath*): Even historic industrial and warehouse buildings may sometimes contain finished interior spaces. Although the upper floors and most of the first floor of this 1927 factory were rough, unfinished spaces typical of this type of structure, a portion of the first floor which was used for an office always had plastered walls. The building was recently rehabilitated for residential apartments upstairs with several retail spaces on the first floor. One of the tenants in a first floor retail space left a jagged portion of lath exposed when repairing the plaster walls, apparently, as a decorative accent. This treatment was determined not to meet the Standards. Replastering the exposed lath re-established the finished plaster wall which characterized this historic office space, and allowed the rehabilitation project to be certified.



This small manufacturing building had brick walls in the industrial spaces, but several offices on the first floor had finished plaster walls.



During the rehabilitation, a tenant left an area of the wood lath exposed when repairing the plaster walls in an office space. This treatment was not compatible with the historic character of this traditionally finished space, and the plaster had to be repaired before the project could meet the Standards.